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Julien Zarifian



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- 1 The fact that the 2000s, which started with the 9/11 terrorist attacks, were difficult years for the foreign policy of the United States is a commonly accepted idea. It is also a banality to assert that George W. Bush's unilateral post-9/11 foreign policy, which has been vehemently criticized and challenged all over the world, was not the best answer to face the volatile world situation. However, although these two points are true, they are a bit simplistic and they tend to reduce a decade of global U.S. foreign policy to George W. Bush's Global War on Terror, which had a significant impact on many U.S. foreign policy dimensions, but which arguably does not reflect the full and complex reality of U.S. diversified geopolitical projection and diplomatic action.

2

While failures or relative failures in Iraq, Afghanistan, Iran's nuclear program, with Venezuela, and difficulties with Russia, China, European allies, etc. are often evoked when it comes to analyzing and evaluating the U.S. foreign policy of the past decade, other less visible or emblematic cases are almost never mentioned in the media, nor studied in academic circles. This is the case of the South Caucasian region (Armenia, Azerbaijan, Georgia), whose geopolitical importance to the U.S. is often mentioned – and, perhaps, a bit overestimated –, but which remains, in the end, quite poorly explored by the academic community.

3

This certainly is something that one could regret, mostly for three reasons: the foreign policy of the U.S. in the South Caucasus has been multidimensional and, therefore, complex and interesting; it has clearly impacted politics and geopolitics in Armenia, Azerbaijan, and Georgia, and it is therefore indispensable to understand

national and regional political and geopolitical evolutions; it shows the foreign policy of the U.S. – particularly under President George W. Bush, but also under President Bill Clinton – under a new light that tends to contradict a few ideas commonly accepted about these two presidents' foreign policies.

4

The goals of this article are therefore twofold. First, it aims at exploring and analyzing the active and multidimensional foreign policy the U.S. has led in the South Caucasus since the fall of the U.S.S.R. and the independence of the Republics of Armenia, Azerbaijan, and Georgia in 1991. Second, it aims at identifying and discussing what the case of the South Caucasus says about the foreign policy of Bill Clinton and George W. Bush. More specifically, through the case of the South Caucasus, we will test two ideas often asserted in academic literature and in the media: 1) the foreign policy of George W. Bush was excessive and unsuccessful, and very much based on coercion; 2) the foreign policies of Bill Clinton and George W. Bush were radically different.

5

This paper is divided into four sections. The first one presents the main characteristics of Presidents Clinton and Bush's foreign policies as they are most often depicted in academic literature. The next three sections analyze the goals and the main characteristics of the U.S. policy in the South Caucasus in the 1990s and 2000s, and the last one expands upon what the South Caucasian case brings to the global understanding of Clinton and Bush's foreign policies.

THE U.S. AND THE WORLD DURING THE 1990s AND THE 2000s

- 6 The 1990s were crucial years for the foreign policy of the U.S. The end of the bipolar world forced the U.S. to adapt to the new world geopolitical situation and it was a difficult endeavor. President George Bush senior, “[d]espite his considerable experience, [...] did not find it easy to articulate what the U.S. role should be in the post-Cold War world.” (Cameron 2005, 14) After only one year in office following the Cold War, the Bush administration did much in terms of foreign policy, but did not establish any “grand strategy” as to the role the U.S. should play on the new geopolitical scene. (Suri 2009, 620) The task was difficult mostly because, as explained by Harvard Professor Stephen Walt, “[...] the United States [was left in] a position of unprecedented preponderance[,] America’s economy [was] forty percent larger than that of its nearest rival, and its defense spending equal[ed] that of the next six countries combined [...]” but, in the meantime, “[a]lthough any number of problems merit[ed] U.S. attention, America simply [did] not face the sort of imminent geopolitical challenge it [had] often faced in the twentieth century.” (Walt 2000, 65-6) Therefore, it took some time for Bill Clinton too, to establish a “grand strategy”. Elected in November 1992, it took him a few months before he and his team established the global framework in which his administration shaped its foreign policy. The main points of what was to become the Clinton Doctrine were conceptualized in the course of 1993, mostly by Anthony Lake, Bill Clinton’s National Security Advisor and one of his closest advisors. In a September 1993 address, he explained that the “[...] successor to a doctrine of containment must be a strategy of [...] enlargement of the world’s free community of market democracies.” (Haas 1997, 113) The focus was therefore clearly put on the economy, with the idea of promoting U.S.

economic interests in the world, but the doctrine also consisted in favoring democracy and freedom everywhere. U.S. leadership considered it should be established and supported, and particularly in the former Soviet Union, whose fifteen former republics were facing major difficulties in switching from a communist system to a democratic and free market based one. This Doctrine also known under the name of “Democratic Enlargement” soon had a geostrategic constituent too, particularly through the NATO enlargement objective. It also clearly accepted the idea of using military power if and when necessary. Although some observers considered that Clinton’s foreign policy lacked consistency and was more of “[...] a series of seemingly unrelated decisions in response to specific crises [...]”ⁱ, most U.S. foreign policies were driven by one or more of the above mentioned axis and, in the end, were, according to Stephen Walt, dominated by four goals. “First, the administration [...] sought to dampen security competition and reduce the risk of major war in Europe, East Asia, and the Middle East, largely by remaining militarily engaged in each of these regions. Second, the administration [...] worked to reduce the threat of weapons of mass destruction (WMD). Third, it [...] tried to foster a more open and productive world economy, which it correctly sees as an important component of U.S. economic prosperity. Fourth, the administration [...] tried to build a world order compatible with basic American values by encouraging the growth of democracy and by using military force against major human rights abuses.” (Walt 2000, 65) First viewed quite negatively by analysts of the 1990s and the 2000s,ⁱⁱ the foreign policy of the Clinton administration has since been reassessed,ⁱⁱⁱ probably in light of George W. Bush’s foreign policy in the 2000s, commonly perceived as a global failure.

7

Bill Clinton enabled the U.S. to enter the new world geopolitics, and permitted the U.S. to adapt its leadership to new realities and, in the end, to maintain it. However, one recurrent criticism towards his foreign policy is that it did not do enough to prevent Islamic terrorism from growing. In any case, it is often presented as radically different from that of his successor, George W. Bush. (Leffler 2005, 395).

8

The terrorist attack of September 11, 2001, on the World Trade Center in New York, totally changed George W. Bush’s perspectives on world affairs and on U.S. foreign policy. It actually created perspectives for him and for his team. The violent attacks on the World Trade Center (and on the Pentagon) killed about 3,000 civilians and made everyone realize in the U.S. that the country had an enemy ready and able to attack not only American interests abroad, but also the country itself. It was a shock, including for the president, and it totally changed his vision of what U.S. foreign policy should be. During his presidential campaign and the first months following his election, George W. Bush did not show a major interest in foreign affairs and did not expose any major strategy in this field. There were plans to modernize U.S. military forces and to focus on developing free trade abroad, as well as redesigning foreign aid. But neither the president nor the top officials (such as Secretary of State Colin Powell, Secretary of Defense Donald Rumsfeld, or National Security Adviser Condoleezza Rice) considered Islamic terrorism a top priority. (Leffler 2011) As Vice-President Cheney put it in 2003, “9/11 changed everything,” (“Meet the Press...” 2003) in the sense that it provided Bush and his administration with a concrete and highly important goal in terms of foreign policy (namely, defeating terrorism) and because it permitted the toughest and the most warmongering elements among Bush’s team to impose their ideas – or, at least, some of

their ideas. “Assertive nationalists” (Daalder & Lindsay 2003, 15) such as Dick Cheney and Donald Rumsfeld, allied with some neoconservatives inside the administration^{iv} who sought both “the muscular assertion of American power” and “the promotion of democracy” (Vaïsse 2010, 3). Together, they supported and led U.S. aggressive response to 9/11, and coined it as the “Global War on Terror” (GWOT). This GWOT, whose main goal was to destroy Al Qaeda but also justified attempts to change regimes opposed to the U.S. and to affirm U.S. diplomatic and geopolitical domination (Smith 2006, xi), complicated U.S. relations with some of its historical allies, such as France, and considerably tarnished U.S. and George W. Bush’s image in the world (Chiozza 2009). Mostly because of its unilateral and bellicose stance, and because of the failure of the war in Iraq (that officially lasted from 2003 to 2011, causing the deaths of tens of thousands people including several thousand U.S. soldiers, and tended to create more problems than it solved^v), George W. Bush’s foreign policy has been frequently described, and is commonly perceived, as bad and ineffective, when it is not clearly presented as a fiasco. As one of the many examples of this negative characterization, one can cite an article published in 2010 by Stephen Walt, in *Foreign Policy*, whose title was “Delusion Points” and subtitle was “Don’t Fall for the Nostalgia – George W. Bush’s foreign policy really was that bad.” (Walt 2010)

9

However, these rather global perceptions on G. W. Bush’s (as well as on B. Clinton’s) foreign policy are most often shaped according to a few emblematic cases of their foreign action, such as US-Russia relations or U.S. policy in the Balkans in the case of B. Clinton, and the GWOT in the case of G. W. Bush. The study of less emblematic and less strategic U.S. foreign policies, such as the ones led in the South Caucasus, tends to underline other aspects of U.S. foreign policy and, in the end, to show it in a different light.

MOTIVATIONS AND GOALS OF THE FOREIGN POLICY OF THE U.S. IN THE SOUTH CAUCASUS

- 10 Although it is difficult to establish scientifically the importance of a country, of a region, or even of a specific issue for another country, it appears to be quite essential to do so for anybody who wants to analyze and evaluate the foreign policy of a State.

11

In the case of the South Caucasus, one must resist the temptation to overestimate its geopolitical significance for America, as some analysts tended to do in the 1990s and 2000s (and, to some extent, have continued to do). In other words, although U.S. officials themselves sometimes presented the South Caucasus with emphasis and as an excessively important region,^{vi} it was not a top priority in Washington and no vital U.S. interests were at stake in Armenia, Azerbaijan, and Georgia. However, it obviously does not mean that it was not important at all on the U.S. world geopolitical chessboard. On the contrary, a few specificities made, and today still make, this region relatively significant.

12

Most of this significance either directly came, or at least derived, from its geographical and geostrategic position. The very fact that the Southern Caucasus is located in Eurasia, this huge world region of major importance in U.S. world strategy, made it of special importance, particularly in the years following the fall of the U.S.S.R. Moreover, the Southern Caucasus is not only located in Eurasia, it occupies a central

position in Eurasia. A part of Azerbaijan is located in famous early 20th century geostrategist Sir H. Mackinder's "Heartland," which must be controlled by any power that wants to dominate world affairs. According to Zbigniew Brzezinski, another famous scholar and former President Carter's National Security Advisor, Azerbaijan is also one of the few Eurasian "pivots."

13

At the same time, this geographical position has also shaped old and rich relations between today's Armenia, Azerbaijan, and Georgia, and three major Eurasian powers, which have counted very much in U.S. Eurasian and world strategy since WWII, Russia, Turkey, and Iran. Therefore, from an American perspective, the three South Caucasian republics could be viewed – and, in fact, although it was rarely recognized by U.S. officials, were viewed – in a broader framework. They could be "used" by the U.S. in their relations with Russia, Turkey, and Iran, to contain hostile Iran or favor allied Turkey.

14

This South Caucasian significant geographical particularity was also related to energy resources and their transportation towards Western markets. Azeri Caspian subsoil have proved to be oil- and gas-rich for a long time. Therefore, at the end of the Soviet period, American and other Western companies became interested in getting involved in the production, transportation, and selling of these resources. They were openly supported by U.S. administrations, for economic but also political reasons. Indeed, the idea was to secure Caspian oil and gas production and transportation, while breaking the Soviet inherited Russian monopoly in this field, and also excluding Iran from it.

15

The South Caucasus importance, in the framework of this "great game" for geopolitical influence and for oil and gas, certainly increased with 9/11 and George W. Bush's war on terrorism, whose main fields were Afghanistan and Iraq. The region was already considered as a "[...] buffer zone to contain the spread of Islamic fundamentalism [...]" (Gorgiladze 1998, 19) in the 1990s, but the fact that it is quite close to Afghanistan and even closer to Iraq, made this point more central in the 2000s. Armenia, Azerbaijan, and Georgia even began to be considered as interesting "support bases" for the military actions led by the U.S. and its allies in these two countries. The support of these three countries of the U.S.-led war on terrorism could also be important symbolically speaking: they are "local" geopolitical players whose support could serve as an example. This is particularly true for Azerbaijan, which, although a secular country, is predominantly Muslim and a member of the Organization of the Islamic Conference (OIC). It makes it a special partner for the U.S. and in U.S.-led coalitions. It allows the U.S. to show that they are not opposed to the "Muslim world" but only to Islamic terrorism. (Mathey 2004, 124)

16

Apart from these mainly geopolitical, geostrategic, and geo-economic parameters, the fact that an important ethnic lobby, the Armenian one – in addition to other ethnic and non-ethnic lobbies – considers the region as a primary field for its activities, also makes the South Caucasus quite special and significant from a Washingtonian point of view. Although they are not many in a country of about 320 million people today, the one to two million Americans of Armenian background – most of them descendants of 1915 Armenian Genocide survivors, but a significant number of them being more recent immigrants coming from the Republic of Armenia – are quite

well organized in Washington, D.C. They have two lobbying organizations whose goal is to defend and promote Armenian interests: the Armenian National Committee of America (ANCA) and the Armenian Assembly of America (AAA). They also have established very strong relations with some political leaders, particularly Congressmen, who lead the Congressional Caucus on Armenian Issues. These Armenian lobbies and their supporters do not “call the shots” in Washington but they, along with some other groups – particularly a few related to oil and gas companies –, are quite dynamic and they have a “resonance” capacity that tends to make the South Caucasus special to American political leaders.

17

Therefore, in the months and first years following the independence of the three republics, in 1991, the U.S. started to show a clear, although not dramatically high, interest for the South Caucasus. Since that time, the U.S. policy towards Armenia, Azerbaijan, and Georgia has been quite active and multidimensional, if we except the very beginning of this policy, under George Bush presidency (and, arguably, the past few years, with Barack Obama).

18

Indeed, George Bush senior, who is famous for having been quite a “prudent” president, in particular with regards to foreign relations (Howard 1998), was a bit hesitant on what attitude and policy to adopt towards the South Caucasus. U.S. leadership happened to be – as, in fact, was the rest of the world – quite surprised by the relatively brutal fall of the U.S.S.R. and by the independence of the ex-Soviet republics. In the meantime, it had not much knowledge of nor experience in the South Caucasian region (Hill 2001, 95), where the situation was, in the years 1991 and 1992, particularly tense and unstable. That is probably why President Bush and his Secretary of State James Baker, although they recognized the independence of the three republics and started formal relations with them – by opening embassies and signing the first bilateral treaties –, did not seem particularly keen to get really involved in South Caucasian geopolitics (Baker 1995, 629).

19

It is under President Bill Clinton that a real South Caucasian U.S. foreign policy started taking shape. To the contrary of President Bush, Bill Clinton decided to establish a new – i.e. post-bipolar – global foreign strategy, the Clinton Doctrine, as previously noted.

20

This general framework had a direct impact on the South Caucasus, whose three countries happened to be ex-Soviet republics that were, in 1993 and thereafter, in political and economic transition, and trying to establish their place in the new international community. In the meantime, the U.S. could not ignore a few South Caucasian specificities that we developed above, related to oil and gas resources or geostrategy, and these parameters also contributed to shape the making of the U.S. South Caucasian policy.

21

Consequently, a general policy, which one could arguably call a “strategy,”^{vii} was defined. Officially, its main objectives, as presented in 1996-1997 by Strobe Talbott, former Deputy Secretary of State, in a series of speeches, were the following: supporting political and economic reforms in these countries, contributing in resolving regional conflicts, supporting energy security, and promoting American companies commercial

interests. (Hill 2001, 101) As we will discuss in detail in the last section of this article, these objectives did not change much after the election of George W. Bush, as former State Department Deputy Assistant in charge of the South Caucasus, Matthew Bryza, explained in 2006, although security issues, probably because of 9/11 and the Global War on Terror, were considered more central (“Caucasus: U.S. Says... ” 2006). This U.S. strategy also had, although denied by U.S. officials but recognized by most observers, a geopolitical aim, in the sense that it was taking place in the context of a “great game” with Russia. Indeed, at least from 1996-1997, Russia was struggling to maintain its influence over areas where the U.S. and other powers (such as, in the case that interests us, Iran, Turkey, and the E.U.) were trying to gain some.

22

In order to reach its objectives in the South Caucasus, the U.S. soon got involved in regional geopolitics and soon started a geopolitical penetration of the region. The main manifestations of this penetration were the financial assistance provided to the three republics, democracy promotion, military assistance and cooperation, energy policy, and diplomatic involvement in the resolution of regional conflicts.

FINANCIAL ASSISTANCE, DEMOCRACY PROMOTION, AND MILITARY COOPERATION, AS MAJOR TOOLS OF U.S. GEOPOLITICAL PENETRATION IN THE SOUTH CAUCASUS

- 23 As early as 1992, the U.S. started a policy of technical, humanitarian, and, above all, financial assistance to the three republics. Although this assistance to Azerbaijan was considerably reduced, because of the war between Azerbaijan and Karabakhi Armenians for the Nagorno-Karabakh region, and because of the pressures from the U.S. Armenian lobby, Armenia and Georgia became major U.S. foreign aid receivers.

24

This assistance was mostly implemented through the Foreign Assistance Act, amended in 1992 by Section 201 of the Freedom Support Act, and was mostly distributed via USAID. Through this umbrella, according to several official documents, Georgia has received more than \$ 3 billion and Armenia has received more than \$ 2 billion since 1992. As an example, in 2003, Armenia received \$ 89.7 million, corresponding, this same year, to 21.3% of its annual budget^{viii}. This logic of financial assistant started by the Clinton administration was continued and developed under Bush. Indeed, in 2004, another foreign aid agency was created, the Millenium Challenge Corporation (MCC), and Armenia and Georgia were among the first countries chosen to be part of this financial aid program. They were both involved in a five-year program, called a “compact,” mostly focusing on agriculture, communication, and energy networks, which came to an end in 2011, and which was then renewed for Georgia, but not for Armenia. In the meantime, traditional annual assistance through the Freedom Support Act tended to decrease and has been considerably reduced these past few years under the Obama administration’s impetus. This significant aid in the 1990s and 2000s accompanied Armenia and Georgia’s efforts towards democracy and a better economic situation, and promoted a rather positive image of the U.S. in Armenia and Georgia. It has therefore facilitated a progressive rapprochement between the U.S. and the two South Caucasian republics. In

the meantime, it has also induced some dependency between the two republics and Washington, and it has turned out to be an efficient tool for the U.S. that could, if necessary, stop its financial assistance – either momentarily or for good. It is what Washington decided to do after the serious political and social troubles following the contested election of Serge Sarkissian, in 2008, as Armenian President, by cancelling some of the MCC Compact funding (“U.S. Cuts Millennium Challenge...” 2009). On the contrary, the U.S. momentarily, but drastically, increased assistance to Georgia, after the 2008-war against Russia, to show its support of Tbilisi.

25

Another important aspect of U.S. South Caucasian policy of the 1990s and 2000s was the promotion of democracy. It was particularly true during the George W. Bush presidency, but not only. It was sometimes related to the above mentioned foreign aid, because some funding was directed towards justice system reforms, decentralization, promotion of civil society involvement in political life, particularly through NGOs, support to the media, etc. It was also particularly visible during 2003 Rose Revolution in Georgia. Although American officials denied having directly supported regime change in Georgia (Warner 2003), it is a proven fact that the U.S. played at least an indirect role in the events that, at the end of 2003, allowed opposition leader Mikhail Saakashvili to overthrow then president Eduard Shevardnadze and to become president (after democratic elections in January 2004). As specialist Lincoln Mitchell explains it: “By encouraging and helping to develop coalitions through hosting roundtables between the parties, facilitating discussions, providing ongoing advice to leaders of opposition parties supporting study trips to Poland [...] and to Serbia [...], and other means, U.S.-funded organizations were becoming involved in politics in a way that went beyond simply providing technical support for fair elections [...]” (Mitchell 2010, 123) After Mikhail Saakashvili peacefully came to power, notably thanks to massive street demonstrations, the George W. Bush administration did not criticize this “non-violent coup d’État” and started to vibrantly support the new regime, openly pro-Western and opposed to Moscow. This support then continued but became less vibrant and more discreet after the Russian-Georgian war of 2008. Still, the U.S. did not stop their support, even when democracy and Human Rights were openly challenged by Tbilisi (Mitchell 2008). In the same vein, U.S. officials did not seem to think much of diverse and frequent restrictions of freedom recorded in Azerbaijan, where President Heydar Aliiev handed over power to his son Ilham in 2003. The fact that Georgia is a strategic ally and Azerbaijan an energy ally of the U.S. probably tends to make Washington more complaisant towards these regimes.

26

Indeed, both Georgia and Azerbaijan have been firmly included in major U.S. projects since the 1990s and even more this past decade. The two countries are very close NATO partners, Georgia even having been very close to getting a MAP (Membership Action Plan, the very last step before full integration to the Atlantic Alliance) in 2008. Armenia is also involved in many NATO programs but, contrary to Azerbaijan and Georgia, Armenian leadership has always been very clear that the goal for Armenia was not to become a member of NATO. The three countries also participated in the global fight against terrorism led by the U.S. after the 9/11 attacks. This is particularly true for Georgia, whose participation to the war in Iraq was significant – up to 2,000 Georgian soldiers were active on the ground (“Georgia to withdraw...” 2008) – but also for Azerbaijan, which was the first country, where the majority of the population is Muslim,

to send troops to Iraq, although in very small number. In the military field, the U.S. also succeeded in controlling and using several radar stations in Azerbaijan (“The U.S. and Azerbaijan” 2004; “Iran is not Worried...” 2006) and became directly involved in Caspian Sea affairs thanks to the “Caspian Guard,” a “[...]” program launched by the United States in 2003 [that] helped Azerbaijan (and Kazakhstan) to build naval security forces to protect critical infrastructure as well as to prevent illegal trafficking and smuggling in the Caspian.” (Valiyev 2012, 3) It also actively participated in building the Georgian military, particularly through the 2003-2004 Train and Equip Program (GTEP) that, among other things, permitted the creation and training of four light infantry battalions and one mechanized armored company, thanks to a \$64 million funding (Gularidze 2004). The U.S. also provided annual military financial assistance to the three republics that in particular has permitted training and officers meetings.

ENERGY POLICY AND CONFLICTS RESOLUTION, AND THE AFFIRMATION OF U.S. PRESENCE IN THE SOUTH CAUCASUS

- 27 The economic constituent of U.S. foreign policy in the South Caucasus was important as well. It has mostly concerned energy issues because Azerbaijan is an oil- and gas-rich country, and because South Caucasian territories had to be used in order to transport Caspian and Central Asian resources towards Western markets, bypassing Iran and Russia. The U.S. was firmly involved in this field, particularly since the mid-1990s. After major efforts on the part of U.S. diplomacy, and thanks to a determined involvement of President Clinton himself (“Speech of the President...” 1998), the “contract of the century” was signed in 1994. As a result, Western energy companies gained control of Azeri Caspian oil fields and their presence in the new consortium was significant (about 45% of the shares). The British company BP was slightly dominant, with a 17,127% share, followed by the American company Amoco, 17,010%. (Yérasimos 1996, 118) Russian Lukoil, traditionally dominant in this area, got a 10% share, which it sold a few years later, and Turkish State-controlled TPAO got 6,75%. (Jafalian 2004, 152) After some time, BP, which merged with Amoco, became the major player in this consortium and, since that time, it has played a “special” role in Azerbaijan economic, but also political and geopolitical life. (Lussac 2010, 25) This “contract of the century” was a major success for U.S. diplomacy. However, it was only a first step. The next step was to secure the transportation of this oil from Baku towards western markets, bypassing Russia and Iran. After a few more years of diplomatic efforts, the U.S.-supported B.T.C. (Baku-Tbilissi-Ceyhan) pipeline was built. This 1,009 mile long tube, the economic profitability of which was really not sure when the contract to build it was signed, was open in 2005. It passes through Azerbaijan, Georgia, and Turkey, and bypasses Russia and Iran, but also Armenia, because of an Azerbaijani veto.^{ix} BP was dominant in the consortium that built it and that has operated it, by up to more than 30%, but the U.S. companies’ share in the B.T.C. is significant (13,26%, including 8,4% for Chevron, 2,5% for ConocoPhillips, and 2,36% for Hess). (Jafalian 2004, 161) Qualified in 2005 by State Department spokesman Richard Boucher as a “major success,” (Arvedlund 2005) the B.T.C. has permitted the U.S. to affirm itself as a major South Caucasian geopolitical player. The U.S. also got involved in other South Caucasian oil or gas pipeline construction, and it supported, in the 2000s, the Nabucco project, the idea of which was to build a gigantic gas pipeline from Baku to

Austria. This project, whose estimated cost was \$ 7.9 billion, reached quite an advanced stage in the second half of the 2000s, but was finally abandoned in 2013. (Tirone 2013)

28

Finally, another field where the U.S. South Caucasian policy was quite active during the Bill Clinton and George W. Bush eras, was the one of the resolution of regional conflicts. With the end of the U.S.S.R., few very serious conflicts (re)started, mostly between regions that wanted to secede and the central powers of the about to become – or newly-born – republics. The most critical ones were, and still are today, the ones in Abkhazia, South Ossetia, and Nagorno-Karabakh. The U.S. has never been influential in the resolution of Abkhazian and South Ossetian conflicts. These two conflicts, which were armed conflicts between 1991 and 1993, took place in the north of Georgia, at the border with Russia. Moscow has therefore always been firmly involved in them, supporting the two seceding regions on the one hand and playing the role of arbitrator on the other. The U.S. position on these conflicts has always been clear and has not changed much in twenty years: it is opposed to Abkhazian and South Ossetian secessions, and also to the resumption of military violence. However, it has never been able to play an effective role in the peace negotiations following the wars that permitted Abkhazia and South Ossetia to formally secede from Georgia – whose central power never accepted this secession. Washington only played an indirect and very limited role, through the UN and the OSCE (Organization for Security and Co-operation in Europe) in the 1990s and 2000s. After the August 2008 war between Georgia and Russia in South Ossetia, the situation became even more frozen and the role of the U.S. in it became even more insignificant. Russia won the five-day war and consequently officially recognized the independence of the Republics of Abkhazia and South Ossetia. Even though the Obama administration still maintained this issue on its diplomatic agenda (U.S. State Department 2010), the situation is totally blocked today and the U.S. cannot do much about it. The situation is quite different concerning the Karabakh conflict. The region, located during the Soviet period in the Soviet Republic of Azerbaijan, but composed of a large majority of ethnic Armenians, has separated, *de facto*, from Azerbaijan since the end of the Soviet era and in a more established way after the war ended in 1994. This war caused several thousand deaths and created about one million refugees (about 700,000 Azeris and 300,000 Armenians). Since that time, the conflict has been considered frozen – although soldiers are quite frequently shot along the front line – and the U.S. has been co-president, with Russia and France, of OSCE Minsk Group, in charge of the peace negotiations. Although they have not been able to find a solution, the three co-presidents have been quite active. They have tried to prevent war from resuming and to bring the two parties to a compromise. They apparently almost succeeded in doing so several times, particularly during negotiation talks in Key West, in 2001, under U.S. impetus (Reeker 2001). The U.S. is often considered, particularly by Armenians, to be close to the Azeris, but it has, apparently, always tried to be constructive and to find a compromise acceptable for both parties.^x In the same vein, the U.S. also tried to get effectively involved in a hypothetical Armenia-Turkey rapprochement, without much success. It tried to use its influence and the fact that it was close to both Ankara and Yerevan – despite the fact that the U.S. executive branch refused to recognize the Armenian Genocide of 1915 –, to play a role of “go-between” and conciliator. It supported a process of track-two diplomacy symbolized by the creation of the Turkish Armenian Reconciliation Commission (TARC) that encouraged discussions between leading Turkish and Armenian figures between 2001 and 2004, and then became really active in the 2008-2009 state-to-state normalization process between Turkey and

Armenia. This process led to the signature of protocols between Armenian and Turkish ministers of Foreign Affairs in 2009, but these protocols were not ratified, then, by the two countries' parliaments. Although this was a failure for the U.S. and their international partners, this important attempt showed the crucial role the U.S., along with other partners such as Russia or the European Union, could play in this affair.

ON THE CONTINUITY BETWEEN THE CLINTON AND BUSH FOREIGN POLICIES AND ON THEIR GLOBAL EFFICIENCY

- 29 The foreign Policy of the U.S. in the South Caucasus in the 1990s, and maybe even more in the 2000s, is an interesting example of an – at least relatively – coherent, efficient, and successful American foreign policy. It is quite difficult to assert that President Clinton's administration established a very sharp and well-defined strategy towards the region, but it drew a few important lines, particularly regarding the geopolitical importance of Armenia, Azerbaijan, and Georgia from an American viewpoint and the objectives that should drive U.S. foreign policy. These objectives, the major characteristic of which is to be quite well “calibrated” and not too ambitious, and the subsequent policies, did not change significantly in the 2000s. Although President George W. Bush's war on terrorism somewhat intensified U.S. regional policy, it was not structurally disrupted.

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The efficiency and the success of a foreign policy are extremely difficult to formally and scientifically establish. First, because the results of a policy are, most of the time, hard to measure and debatable, and secondly, because they depend much on the objectives to be reached, and these objectives are not always clear and moreover not always stated by the authorities in charge of it. In the case of the South Caucasus, we have argued that the goal of the U.S. was to geopolitically penetrate the region – a region it had no contact with and no expertise on before the end of the U.S.S.R. – and to gain influence in it. It does not seem that the goal of the U.S. was to become the hyper dominant or possibly only regional geopolitical power, but rather to establish a strong foothold there thanks to political, economic, and diplomatic levers (that, one could assume, could be activated if necessary). If such an analysis is right, we can therefore consider that the U.S., under Presidents Clinton and Bush, reached their goal. The different policies implemented permitted the U.S. to be firmly involved in every aspect of South Caucasian geopolitics (including resolution of conflicts and the energy sector) without, at least “flagrantly,” trying to totally exclude other geopolitical players, be it the ones to which it is close but which could also be competitors (Turkey or the EU) or the ones with which it has strained relations (Russia and Iran). It, apparently, opted for not putting too much pressure on the three South Caucasian countries but assisted them and seemed to stand next to them when needed. This U.S. “smart” geopolitical penetration also, arguably, enabled these countries not to become totally dependent on one power (as had been the case during most of the history of these peoples and territories).

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If these considerations could appear relatively coherent with what we know of Bill Clinton's foreign policy, this is not what was necessarily expected from George W. Bush's foreign policy, at least according to most perceptions we had and still have of his

foreign policy. This does not necessarily lead to reassessing it. As far as foreign policy is concerned, the legacy that President Bush left to his successor is commonly considered very negative. This is not only because of the GWOT, but also because the Bush administration did not solve the Iranian and North Korean nuclear questions, tended to neglect the Israeli-Palestinian conflict, did not ameliorate relations with Russia (on the contrary, they worsened in the 2000s), and made the U.S. less “popular” and less respected in the world (Laïdi 2012, 21). However, the case of the South Caucasus tends to show that Bush’s foreign policy could differ very much from one region to another and from one question to another. In other words, it implies that Bush’s foreign policy was more complex and less monolithic than it was and still is often depicted. The foreign policy of the U.S. was and still is global and it is therefore difficult and risky to qualify it in broad terms, without studying each and every one of its aspects, including the less “famous” and the less “visible” ones.

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The fact that the foreign policy of George W. Bush in the South Caucasus functioned quite well and reached its goals, is as noteworthy as the fact that it resembles considerably Bill Clinton’s and that it presents more elements of continuity than elements of change. While, as we explained above, it is difficult to affirm that the different institutions involved in this U.S. South Caucasian policy have systematically coordinated a formal “strategy” in the South Caucasus, the different policies led by the US all sought at “carefully” and gradually gaining influence in the region. And this logic, as well as the policies used to implement it – sometimes by the same officials, particularly in the State Department –, did not change much between both presidents and between the different administrations of these two presidents. For example, the Clinton administration started using the financial assistance provided to the three South Caucasian countries (and particularly to Armenia and Georgia) as an important foreign policy “tool,” but the Bush administration continued in the same way. The assistance through the Freedom Support Act and the U.S.A.I.D. tended to decrease in the 2000s but this decrease was counterbalanced by the integration of Armenia and Georgia in the Millennium Challenge Program. The same thing occurred in terms of democracy promotion. Both administrations were quite active in this field. The Bush administration was the one which supported regime change in Georgia in 2003 and which supported Mikhail Saakashvili and his pro-democracy rhetoric, however the Clinton administration also focused on democratization. Gerard Libaridian, who was an adviser to the first Armenian president, Levon Ter Petrosyan, in the 1990s, explains: “During my tenure, for instance, Armenia’s democratic and economic reforms were the principal concern of the international community, and especially the United States.” (Libaridian 1998, 8) As for the strategic and military components of the U.S. South Caucasian policy, the rapprochement was clearly initiated in the 1990s, thanks to bilateral policies and *via* NATO, and continued, approximately in the same way, in the 2000s. One could have assumed, with regard to the GWOT and the then growing tensions with Iran and with Putin’s Russia, that George W. Bush would try to intensify military cooperation with the South Caucasian countries but it was not really the case. One could also have assumed that its will to assert U.S. military force all over the world would push the Bush administration to militarily support Georgia during the August 2008 Russian-Georgian war, but it did not. The fact that Clinton’s and Bush’s foreign policies in the South Caucasus resemble each other does not mean that these two presidents had identical visions of what foreign policy should be and how it should be practiced. The South Caucasus is only one case study, one example

of U.S. foreign policy, and the conclusions drawn from it cannot necessarily be applied generally. However, whereas they do not prove that the foreign policy of Clinton and Bush was identical, they show that some aspects of it were not very different. They also show that the “Bush Revolution in Foreign Policy” (to cite the subtitle of Daalder’s and Lindsay’s book) did not apply to all and did not affect, or significantly affect, all dimensions of U.S. foreign policy.

33 * * *

34 In less than two decades, the U.S. has succeeded in geopolitically penetrating a region it did not know much about before its independence from the U.S.S.R. in 1991. The U.S. did not impose itself as the sole world power dominating the region’s geopolitics, but that is probably not what U.S. authorities sought. However, the U.S. gained solid political and geopolitical levers in the three South Caucasian republics and could become an important regional player, without taking much risk and without, in the end, putting so much into it (if we compare it with other countries or sectors of U.S. foreign policy). It could become so, first because the position of the U.S. in the South Caucasus was (and still is today) quite “comfortable.” Its vital interests were and still are not at stake in the region and, from the beginning, it has been in the position of a strong “challenger,” which did not absolutely have to become the dominant player, but which worked on consolidating its position in order to be influential and powerful when and if necessary. The U.S. also gained solid influence in the region because the policies it implemented there, both under Bill Clinton and George W. Bush, were quite well “calibrated” and quite efficient. They were also coherent and consistent over time. Indeed, we observed that both the “strategy” and the “combination” of policies implemented in the course of the 1990s and the 2000s remained quite the same. The efforts on the financial assistance, the promotion of democracy, the Caspian energy policy, the military cooperation, and the resolution of conflicts, were all started by the Clinton administration and continued by Bush, mostly following similar patterns.

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Because of this active and efficient foreign policy of the U.S. and, also, of other actors such as Iran, Turkey, the European Union, and some European countries, the South Caucasian geopolitical situation considerably evolved in the 1990s and 2000s. Today, the South Caucasus and the three countries that compose it are not under the unique influence or domination of Russia (or the U.S.S.R.) or of another single power – as they have often been throughout history. Although Russia remains a – and in fact *the* – major player, and although their relations with foreign countries still are, most of the time, asymmetrical, Armenia, Azerbaijan, and Georgia, now tend to depend not only on one power but on several. It sometimes puts them in quite uncomfortable situations, but it also, at least potentially, multiplies their geopolitical options.

36

As for recent developments of U.S. South Caucasian foreign policy, many observers point out that Barack Obama, who has refocused the foreign policy of his country on some critical issues and on Southeast Asia, has disengaged the U.S. from the South Caucasus. It appears to be true but it also seems that the Obama administration has done it gradually, without brutally stopping all the programs and all the cooperation with Armenia, Azerbaijan, and Georgia. Although some regret that the Obama administration is not more active in the South Caucasus, the U.S. still holds quite strong positions, and political, diplomatic, economic, and military leverages, most of them inherited from the

Clinton and Bush eras, and this is a situation with which U.S. leadership seems to satisfy itself.

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NOTES

- i. Henry Kissinger quoted in: "America Needs a Design for Foreign Policy", *Economist*, September 28, 2000.
- ii. See, for example: Richard Haass, "Fatal Distraction: Bill Clinton's Foreign Policy", *Foreign Policy* 107 (1997): 112-123, or Stephen Schlesinger, "The End of Idealism", *World Policy Journal* 24 (1998-99): 36-40.
- iii. See, for example: John Dumbrell, "Evaluating the foreign policy of President Clinton, or Bill Clinton : between the Bushes", British Association for American Studies Annual Conference 2005 Cambridge University, 14-17 April 2005, or Foreign Policy's Editors, "Think Again: Clinton's Foreign Policy", *Foreign Policy*, November 19, 2009.
- iv. Among these high-ranking neoconservative officials, one can cite Paul Wolfowitz (Deputy Secretary of Defense), Douglas Feith (Under Secretary of Defense for Policy), Abram Shulsky (in charge of Iran in the Department of Defense), John Bolton (Under Secretary of State for Arms Control and International Security Affairs), Elliott Abrams (in charge of the Middle East at the National Security Council), Lewis Libby (one of the main advisers of Vice-President Cheney), and David Wurmser (Cheney's advisor for the Middle East) (David 2011, 526).
- v. See, for example: Ricks, Thomas E. 2006. *Fiasco. The American Military Adventure in Iraq*, New York: The Penguin Press.
- vi. For exemple, in 1997, U.S. Deputy Secretary of State Strobe Talbott called the South Caucasus and Central Asia "a strategically vital region." Sonia Winter, "Central Asia: U.S. Says Resolving Conflicts A Top Priority," *RFE/RL*, June 9, 1997.
- vii. Although it is quite difficult to affirm that the different institutions involved in this U.S. South Caucasian policy (mainly the State Department, the Department of Defense, the Congress,

and the USAID) have coordinated a “strategy” in the South Caucasus, the different policies led by the US all seem to follow a same rationale whose main idea was to gain influence in the region.

viii. For a detailed presentation and analysis of U.S. financial assistance to Armenia, cf. Zarifian 2006.

ix. This veto was due to the conflict over the Karabakh region, between Azerbaijan and Karabakh Armenians, supported by Armenia.

x. Author’s interview with Henri Jacolin, French co-president of the Minsk Groupe from 2002 to 2004, Paris, February 12, 2009.

ABSTRACTS

The foreign policy of the Bill Clinton and George W. Bush administrations in the South Caucasus (Armenia, Azerbaijan, Georgia) shows U.S. foreign policy under a rather positive light. With consistency and continuity, they were able to implement a multidimensional realistic foreign policy, the main manifestations of which allowed the U.S. to gain, in a few years, solid political, economic, military, and diplomatic leverages. Its vital interests were not at stake in the region and, from the early 1990s onwards, it has been in the position of a potent “challenger” that worked on consolidating its position in order to be influential and powerful when and if necessary. Although it did not become the sole dominant regional power, the U.S. succeeded, mostly in the second half of the 1990s and the first half of the 2000s, in strongly geopolitically penetrating a region with which it previously had no contact and on which it had no major expertise.

AUTHOR

JULIEN ZARIFIAN

University of Cergy-Pontoise